

## Globalization and the imperatives of French in Nigeria

Mufutau A. Tijani

Department of French

Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

[matijj@yahoo.com](mailto:matijj@yahoo.com)

### **Abstract**

*Globalization is considered to be synonymous with modernization, liberalization, liberalized economy, free trade, foreign investments, technological spread, integration, exchange, competitiveness, opportunities, interconnectivity, cosmopolitanism, democracy, migration, etc. It has turned the world into what is commonly referred to as a Global Village characterized by .borderless economies, unhindered commercial exchanges and transactions as well as technological connections and interactions among societies. In the evolving scenario, language plays an important role in facilitating a smooth communication. This paper discusses the relevance of foreign language in the contemporary globalized world with particular focus on the imperatives of French language in Nigeria in this era of globalization.*

### **Introduction**

Today, we live in an era of unprecedented changes in human relations, politics, economies, communication, transportation, and computer technology. The world is undergoing a process of acceleration and intensification of relationships, integration and cooperation among people, companies and governments of different nations. That process, known as globalization, is geared towards the establishment of a borderless world characterized by limitless exchanges and interactions. It has exposed national economies to much more competitions and challenges than ever before. With considerable reduction in the natural barriers of time and space as well increased interdependence among nations, the need for enhanced communication has no doubt become a very important factor. In the evolving situation, the ability to speak other languages has become a necessary tool for the enhancement of socio-cultural, economic and political interactions among societies. More than ever before individuals and nations have become more and more conscious of the importance of foreign language competence.

The thrust of this paper is to look at the role of language within the context of globalization with particular focus on the place of French language in Nigerian's quest for the gains of globalization. The paper explains the concept and features of globalization and goes further to highlight the relevance of the French language in the contemporary globalized world. It concludes that if Nigeria is to fully enjoy the fruits of globalization and effectively overcome the challenges of the globalized society, she needs to seriously encourage the teaching and learning of the French language among the citizenry.

## **Globalization**

Globalization has been considered from different perspectives and angles in relation to different areas of interest, specialization or scope. Historically, Devet (1993) posits that the process of globalization had started in a small way in the nineteenth century, while Toyo (2000), is of the opinion that globalization began when capital moved from Europe to open up new areas in America and Australia, mostly in the building of rail road systems and agriculture that would be central to the expansion of capitalism. On his part, Mrak (2000) considers Globalization as a highly complex and controversial concept, which is not a new phenomenon but a continuation of developments that have been going on for some considerable time. From the foregoing, it is evident that what is commonly referred to as globalization today is a process that started with the Industrial revolution and grew with the post World War II scientific discoveries, the invention of the computer and the advent of the Internet Age.

According to Simpson and Weiner (1989), the term globalization was first used in 1959 in *The Economist* to refer to quotas of car imports. This initial usage was followed in 1962 by an article in *The Spectator*, which referred to globalization as “a staggering concept.” From then, it is believed that the concept has evolved into an interdisciplinary terminology used by different people across time and space to mean different things. In actual fact, globalization has become today a key word used in describing contemporary world events and activities. It is used in various spheres of human endeavours to refer to the complex set of changes or transformations brought about through the process of interactions and exchanges that characterizes the contemporary society. To many, globalization is synonymous with modernization, liberalization, liberalized economy, free trade, foreign investments, technological spread, integration, exchange, competitiveness, opportunities, interconnectivity, cosmopolitanism, democracy, migration, etc. As a result, it is common to read or hear people refer to the world as a global village.

Held et al (1999) consider globalization as “a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions ... generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power”, while Tomlinson (1999:2) views it as “the rapidly developing and ever-designing network of interconnections and interdependencies that characterize modern social life”. These “networks” and “interconnections”, according to Fairclough (2006) are generally seen as very diverse in character, and include: flows of goods and money and international financial and trading networks in the economic field; inter-governmental networks and interdependencies and interactions and interconnections between international agencies such as the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and government agencies at national and regional levels; the mobility of people as migrants, tourists, or members of commercial or governmental organisations; flows of images and

representations and interactions through contemporary media and forms of technology; and so forth.

Globalization can therefore be defined as the process by which different societies become more closely integrated economically, politically, socially and culturally. It covers all aspects of human life, but the most talked about is economic globalization, which, according to Teitel (2005: 445) is “the phenomenon of increased integration of the world economy as evidenced by the growth of international trade and factor mobility”. Other types include corporate globalization, technological globalization, scientific globalization, political globalization, cultural globalization, etc.

While globalization can be said to have brought about several positive changes on human lives all over the world, it is nonetheless blamed for most of the social and economic ills prevailing in different societies today. According to Majekodunmi and Adejuwon (2012: 192), “the fundamental point must be emphasized, that globalization is driven and promoted by western capitalist and imperialist motives and values and has consequently produced two dialectically opposing classes of winners and losers among nations.” In the same light, Smith (1999: 24), strongly believes that “the word globalization is substituted for the word imperialism”. One may be tempted to agree with the anti-globalization group considering especially the situation in Syria where, world powers (which I call global forces) fight themselves, under the guise of humanitarian mission and the institutionalization of global democratic values.

Whatever divides, one chooses to be, the fact remains that globalization is inevitable and its consequences are not only omnipresent but also all encompassing among communities and countries of the world today. This is buttressed by the fact that, with the advent of globalization, the world has not been the same again, most especially in the area of economy, science and technology. No doubt, globalization has brought about scientific and technological development, technological change, globalization of production and expansion of trade in goods and services. The world has also witnessed reduction in the cost of moving people, information, goods and capital, increases in trade and liberalization policies, increases in international capital flows, massive cross border movements, general participation in global economic activities as well as global awareness about human and labour rights and environmental problems. According to Lee and Vivarelli (2006:2), “since the ‘80s, the world economy has become increasingly “connected” and “integrated”; on the one hand, the decreasing transportation costs and the diffusion of Information and Communication Technologies have implied a fast downgrading of the concept of “distance”, while – on the other hand – gross trade, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), capital flows and technology transfers have risen significantly”.

### **Globalization and language**

As a process of acceleration and intensification of relationships, integration and cooperation among people, companies and governments of different nations, globalization

is geared towards the establishment of a borderless world characterized by limitless exchanges and interactions. The pertinent question that comes to mind is “ how could linkages, integrations and interconnections take place among individuals and communities within the globe if they cannot understand themselves or communicate effectively among themselves? In other words, how could the anticipated changes and interactions without effective communication?

Communication cannot be dissociated with language. Language remains an important tool for communication, interaction, influence, persuasion and diplomacy. It constitutes the vital ingredient for the existence of humanity. As Tochon (2009: 109), quoting Schmid (2011), rightly said, “language is more than communication: It represents experience and social attitudes and links knowledge with demands for group worth.” Therefore, if nation states are to enjoy the dividends of globalization they must ensure they communicate successful among themselves.

In the case of Nigeria, if we go by the saying that ‘charity begins at home’, and considering the fact that the country is surrounded by francophone countries, French language is crucial for improved international, regional, interregional interactions, for economic or commercial transactions, for cultural exchanges, etc.

### **The place of the French language in the contemporary world**

French is primarily the mother tongue and official language of over 62 million French citizens living in France (2004 census figures) and in the islands of Guadeloupe, Guyanne, Martinique and la Réunion. In Europe, French is spoken in Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg, while on the American continent, it is spoken by a large population in Quebec (Canada) and Louisianne in the USA. In the Indian Ocean, French is also one of the official languages of countries like Madagascar and Seychelles. French is also one of the official languages in countries like Cameroun, Algeria, Switzerland, Belgium and Canada.

On the African continent, there is a domineering presence of French as official language when compared with other official languages. For instance, there are about 24 countries having French as their official language, as against 19 for the English language. French is of course the official language of countries like Togo, Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Benin Republic, Niger, Senegal, Mali, etc. that were formerly colonized by France. Even within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), out of 15 member countries, 11 are Francophone countries.

It is interesting to note that with the creation of the “Francophony” on the 20th of March 1970, as an organisation equivalent to the Commonwealth, constituted by countries having in common the use of the French language, the love for French and the spread of French socio-cultural and political values have been felt even on the Asian continent. Countries like Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Lebanon have not only encouraged the study of the French language by their youths but have also formulated language policies making French a core subject in their secondary school curricula.

According to recent statistics given by the Director of the West African Regional Office of the Francophonie in Togo, at the International Interdisciplinary Conference on French Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, in February 2016, French is the 2<sup>nd</sup> international language used in the media worldwide, the 2<sup>nd</sup> working language in most international organizations, the second most learnt in the world, the 3<sup>rd</sup> language used in the world of business and the 4<sup>th</sup> language used by Internet users. Today, French is the 5<sup>th</sup> most spoken language in the world after Chinese, English, Spanish and Arabic.

From the foregoing, there is no doubt that French, the official language of Nigeria's neighbors, is a major international language to be reckoned with in world today as the language of international diplomacy, commerce, science and technology. A working knowledge of French language constitutes therefore a very important asset towards securing International jobs. Unfortunately, according to Adebisi (2015:9) , 'it is also known that the linguistic inadequacies of Nigerians landed them in tight situations at various international fora, such as the embarrassment experienced by Nigerian academics when they interact with their Francophone counterparts at international conferences and meetings where the latter speak English competently but where the Nigerians prove to be helpless in French'.

Considering the above statement and the obvious international importance of the French language, there is no doubt that the knowledge of French is a necessity for Nigeria in this era of globalization.

### **The French language as a tool for Nigeria's quest for the dividends of globalization**

An extract from a report of the Working Committee on Language Teaching presented to the Government of the United States America in 1966 (as quoted by Adebisi 2015:6) states as follow:

*The national need for improved communication with other peoples of the world and an awareness of the benefits to be derived from being able to think and speak in the language of other nations or individuals with whom we do business or have political and social contact have brought an expanded interest in and necessity for improved programs in foreign languages.*

The above statement greatly underscores the importance for the study of foreign languages by a country. For, if the USA, has taken this position as far back as 1966, one finds it difficult to understand why a developing country like Nigeria is not taking a leaf from the American's experience.

There is no doubt that, with a basic and working knowledge of French language, Nigerian leaders and decision makers would be able to access information, to understand them and to interpret them critically. They will also be well informed in taking decisions capable of promoting better international interactions, connections and exchanges. For the citizens, the ability to read, write and speak French will give them the necessary language

skills to effectively follow and understand international events thereby transforming them into well informed and responsible citizen of this country and of the world.

Today, many Nigerian companies, most especially banks, manufacturers and transport enterprises have established their offices in African Francophone countries. Because most Nigerians are not French literate, all the vacancies are filled by Francophone citizens who are mostly bilingual because of their country's educational policies that make the study of English language compulsory at Secondary level. It clear then that, the knowledge of French Language, will not only give Nigerians improved career prospects but also enable them to compete effectively with their Francophone counterparts for the best jobs and for admission into top rated postgraduate and professional Institutions abroad.

Directly and indirectly the study of the French language will surely provide our youths a competitive edge at the international level. It will also equip our professionals with the necessary linguistic competence that will enable them to establish and maintain personal and professional contacts and to engage in cross-border business or cooperation. In other words, for Nigerian professionals such as doctors, lawyers, educators, artists, scientists, etc. to become effective and vie for positions at the international levels they must acquire some knowledge of the French language.

For strategic reasons, for political cooperation, for socio-economic and cultural exchanges as well as peaceful regional integration, French is very important for Nigeria and her citizens. Apart from the fact that over 50 French and francophone companies operate in Nigeria, several Nigerian indigenous companies and banks are established in West African francophone countries. Proficiency in French constitutes therefore a real necessity for Nigerians, especially the youths, who desire not only to be gainfully employed by those companies but also to compete effectively for jobs at the international level.

In order to effectively combat terrorism, most especially with the havocs caused by dreaded Boko Haram insurgents, Nigerians military and all the various security personnel must be French literate. The task of the multinational military group set up to fight the terrorists would be greatly enhanced If only our Nigerian military men could speak French. Without the active cooperation of our Francophone neighbours the country's military onslaught against the terrorist group would not have produced the current good results. In sum, the knowledge of the French language by majority of Nigerians will surely lead to smooth working relationships with the Francophone communities of the world in the areas of commerce, scientific and technological research, administration, education, literature, etc. In the words of Opara (2010), the French language constitutes an important factor for cultural revival and integration in Nigeria and across the West African sub-region and the world at large.

## **Conclusion**

In this era of globalization, scientific and technological innovations as well as accelerated developments in communication and economic relations no nation can live in isolation. In a situation where the global market is becoming more complex, competitive, and interdependent, we can say without any fear of contradiction that globalization is inevitable and irreversible. It has become a forceful and unavoidable phenomenon in the world today so much that the survival of contemporary societies, communities or counties depends on how best they can derive its benefits. In that perspective, Nigeria has no choice but to key into the ideals of globalization.

It is really disheartening to observe governments at different tiers in Nigeria make policies statements and without appropriate legislative backing. An example played out during a recent meeting between Prof Anthony Anwukah, the current Minister of State for Education and the Ambassador of France to Nigeria a few months ago when the former stated again that French is the second official language in Nigeria. One expect that with such a statement credited to a government's high ranking representative, necessary machinery should be put in place for the provision of adequate human and material resources for the teaching and learning of the language at all levels. Unfortunately, concrete actions are still been expected.

Globalization cannot be achieved without removing all obstacles to the free movement of people, capital, labor and goods across international boundaries. One of such obstacles is language barriers. In order to derive the maximum benefits of globalization, therefore, Nigeria must seriously reconsider her foreign language policy because it is often argued that language policies play an important role in international educational reforms aimed at producing competent and competitive world citizens. The Federal Government should, therefore, as a matter of urgency, legislate towards making French language a truly second official language in Nigeria. In the meantime, the Federal and State legislators should make French a compulsory subject to be included among the General studies courses in all higher Institutions.

The Federal Government should also embark on aggressive public enlightenment on the benefits of French literacy for Nigerians. French teaching programmes should be developed for airing on National radio and television stations. This will go a long way in helping people in non formal educational sectors to acquire some basic competence in the language. Assistance could be sought from International organizations interested in the promotion of the French language.

On the whole, let me state once again that a working knowledge of French language is a useful professional asset for Nigerians considering the fact that the world has become what is known today as a global village with a global base for job opportunities for international bilingual individuals. Nigerian political leaders and educational policy formulators must to ensure that French language becomes a core subject in our schools at all levels in order to enhance the country's competitive advantage in the international market in this era of globalization. According to Tochon (2009: 121):

*something new is happening globally that cannot be ignored: new forms of communication transform the world towards a rebalancing of our societies in ways that can be respectful of the variety of viewpoints, world languages and cultures, rather than representing economic pushes for capital in favor of the self-serving and the power-hungry. If globalization were to be reconceptualized as a postcolonial move, it would be important that change be considered a space of dialogue and mutual influence between languages and cultures, not the unilateral imposing of views and ways of organizing society, as if there were the ones and best ways.*

From the above statement, we must recognize the fact that whether we like it or not, the future course of the planet is determined by the process of globalization which spares no nation. Consequently, for Nigeria to derive the benefits therefore, her citizens must be bilingual in at least two major international languages namely English and French

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